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ABSTRACT

The Dutch deictics are typically given a locative analysis: the adverbial pronoun "hier" ("here") and the demonstrative "deze" ("this") are said to point near the speaker, "daar" ("there") and "die" ("that") to point far, with "er" (weak "there") and the article "de" ("the") left unspecified (Bech 1952:7). The present paper rejects this view, arguing that the deictics do not actually "point out" and are not concerned with proximity. Rather, their meanings are more abstract, serving to alert the hearer to the degree to which identification of a particular referent (an entity or a situation) constitutes a problem. Various parallel uses of the Dutch adverbial pronouns and demonstratives are surveyed. It is shown that the locative treatment fails and that the data are best accounted for by an analysis of the deictics as asserting different relative strengths of concentration of attention. Finally, an egocentric mechanism is outlined to account for the association of "hier" and "deze" with high deixis, i.e., maximum concentration of attention, with messages of proximity relative to the speaker. (Author/CLK)

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SCALAR MEANINGS, INFERENTIAL COMPLEXITY, AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: THE SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF DEIXIS IN MODERN DUTCH

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In this paper I will be concerned with two groups of deictic words in Modern Dutch: first the 'determiners' -- the demonstrative adjectives deze 'this' and die 'that' and the definite article de; second, the adverbial pronouns hier 'here,' daar 'there', and er 'unstressed' or 'weak there.' The former are used in pointing to entities, the latter in referring to some spatio-temporal situation.

It is generally assumed that there is a parallelism between the two groups. The classic analysis by the Danish linguist Gunnar Bech is given in [1]:

[1] deze 'this' = de 'the' + Proximity

die 'that' = de 'the' + Distance

hier 'here' = er 'weak there' + Proximity

daar 'there'= er 'weak there' + Distance (Bech 1952:7)

As you can see, deze is treated as an article specified for Proximity, die as an article specified for distance. This parallels the analysis of hier as a Proximate kind of er, daar as a Distal kind.

I would now like to argue that while the two systems are parallel, neither of them asserts anything about relative distance. Hier and deze do not point near; daar and die do not point far. Rather, their meanings are more abstract, serving to alert the hearer to the degree of difficulty of inferring which entity or situation the speaker has in mind.

The trouble with Bech's analysis is that it does not fit the data. To begin with, there are many examples in which die and daar do not point away from the speaker.

[2] Daarna ruimde ze de tafel af en trok haar jas aan. 'Staat die jas gek bij die muts?' vroeg ze. (Van het Reve 1961:69)

Afterwards she cleared the table and put on her coat. 'Does this coat look crazy with this hat?' she asked. [die ≠ far]

[3] Daar ben ik weer! 'Here I am again! [daar ≠ far]

[4] Daar gaan we! 'Here we go!' [daar ≠ far]

Additionally, in many instances die and daar can only be taken as more forceful, more emphatic versions of de and er, with no 'distance' involved whatsoever.

[5] De binnenstad van Rotterdam was totaal verlaten, troosteloos was het om aan te zien en afschuwelijk om door die lege, brandende straten heen te rijden. Daar stond midden in die straat één man, één mens, die niemand zag maar die . . . (Werkman 1965:5).

The center of Rotterdam was totally abandoned, it was horrible to look at it and awful to drive through those empty, burning streets. There stood in the middle of the (?that) street one man, one human being whom no one saw but who . . .

[daar, die for emphasis, not distance]

Informants indicate that the underlined sentence is a more emphatic version of [6a]. Note the use of daar and die for emphasis, er and de for matter-of-factness.

[6]a. Er stond midden in de straat één man. [Matter-of-fact]

b. Daar stond midden in die straat . . . [Emphatic]

Finally, there are uses of deze and hier which do not communicate either spatial or temporal Proximity: Consider [7]:

[7] (Discussion of Dutch author W.F. Hermans) . . . Toch betreft het hier een verhaal dat binnen het oeuvre van deze schrijver uitzonderlijke betekenis heeft, omdat die schrijver hierin voor het eerst . . . tot een formuliering is gekomen van wat men gerust het centrale thema in dit oeuvre mag noemen . . . (Van Straten 1972:144)

Yet here we are dealing with a story having exceptional significance within the literary work of this author because in it the author (?that author) for the first time . . . came to a formulation which may be confidently called the central theme of this work . . .

[No difference in distance, deze used to concentrate attention, not for spatial or temporal proximity]

It is clear that the critic is centering attention on the author by using deze; it is not obvious that he is near the author either in time or space. He might be near him 'in the mind's eye' or some such thing, but this can be nothing other than the centering of attention I've referred to. Similarly with hier. Consider [8]:

[8] (Description of self-absorbed person) . . . Haar naieve egocentrie, haar kinderlijk trekken aan de mensen zonder dat zij begreep hoe tyranniek zij was . . . Maar zo ooit, dan was hier iemand die . . . men moeilijk aansprakelijk kon stellen, ondanks alles . . . (Du Perron 1962:148)

. . . Her naive self-centeredness, her childish pulling at people without understanding in the least how tyrannical she was . . . But if ever, then here was someone . . . whom one could scarcely hold responsible, in spite of everything . . .

[hier used to concentrate attention, not for spatial or temporal proximity]

Again, the speaker is not physically or temporally near the woman but is only concentrating attention on her. What, then, do we do?

I argue that these and other facts are best explained by an analysis of both the 'determiners' and adverbial pronouns as asserting different relative strengths of DEIXIS, or 'Concentration of Attention,' as in [9] on the handout, with deze and hier asserting HIGH DEIXIS, the greatest concentration of attention, die and daar asserting MID DEIXIS, less concentration, and de and er asserting LOW DEIXIS, the least concentration of attention. As you can see, no form says anything about Distance of Proximity.

[9] The Analysis

		'Determiners'	Adverbial Pronouns
DEIXIS (Concentration of Attention)	HIGH	deze	hier
	MID	die	daar
	LOW	de (from Article[1] System)	er

[N.B.: No assertion of Proximity or Distance relative to speaker]

The basic considerations in the use of the Deictic Scale appear to be as follows. In talking about an entity or a situation, the speaker chooses, respectively, a determiner or an adverbial pronoun. The particular one he picks of the

three available will depend on the degree of concentration of attention he wishes to affirm. The hearer, in attempting to understand the speaker, will then draw conclusions from that degree. Consider [10].

[10] The higher the level of DEIXIS (Concentration of Attention) affirmed by the speaker, the more likely

a. that there is a specific referent (entity, situation).
[How could speaker concentrate maximally on something not there? And why would he bother to?]

b. that the referent is important to the speaker [Why concentrate on something irrelevant?] and hence that the hearer must search for the referent in order to understand the speaker.

c. the more likely that the referent is hard to find. Otherwise, the speaker would not have to 'urge on' the hearer via step b. above.

Generally, we can state that the higher the level of deixis affirmed by the speaker the more likely it is that there is in fact some specific referent -- some entity or situation -- that the speaker is focussing on. How, after all, could the speaker concentrate maximally on something not there?

Second, the higher the level of deixis affirmed by the speaker, the more likely it is that the referent is important to him. Why would one concentrate on something irrelevant? Hence, if the hearer wants to understand the speaker, the hearer had better search for and find that referent.

Third, if the speaker has to urge the hearer to search for the referent by the mechanism I've just outlined, then probably that referent is hard to find. Otherwise no urging would be needed.

We may summarize this as in [11]:

[11] The speaker's assertion of a particular level of DEIXIS (Concentration of Attention) alerts the hearer to the degree to which the identification of a particular referent constitutes a problem.

Let us now examine the analysis more closely, beginning with the 'determiners' -- specifically, the contrast between the LOW DEIXIS form de and the MID DEIXIS form die. Consider [12]

[12] a. De auto is niet te koop, maar de fiets wel. [Entity type: different,
The car is not for sale, but the bike is. LOW DEIXIS adequate]

b. *De auto is niet te koop, mar de auto wel. [Entity type: same,
The car is not for sale, but the car is. LOW DEIXIS inadequate]

c. Die auto is niet te koop, maar die auto wel. [Entity type:same,
That car is not for sale, but that car is. MID DEIXIS adequate]

In a, the bike and the car are sufficiently distinguished from each other simply by being different kinds of things. There is no communicative problem and the speaker can get by with LOW DEIXIS; the hearer does not have to work to identify the referents in question. In b, however, there is a problem. The two cars mentioned are not mutually distinguished simply by being cars. The hearer, then, will have to exert himself, to find other clues to the identity of the cars. The speaker alerts him to this task by increasing the level of deixis from LOW to MID as in c. The cars in question are being concentrated on. Hence they are important and should be found. Hence the hearer should be alert for information (such as physical pointing) which will help him find them.

Now we've seen in [12a] that the LOW DEIXIS form de is used when the referent is adequately identified. This is one way in which identification does not pose a problem for the hearer. But there is another way: namely, when the speaker is not interested in specific identity. Consider [13]:

[13] Zij bracht de hand aan het oor. (Vestdijk 1950:79)
She brought the hand to the ear.
'She put her hand to her ear' [Which hand to which ear?? Identification irrelevant, no problem, hence LOW DEIXIS]

In the context from which this sentence is taken, there is no prior mention of hands or ears and in fact we do not know which of the lady's two hands is being held up to which of her two ears. This, however, is irrelevant. The speaker is not giving a precise description but only indicating that the woman can't hear well. Accordingly, he uses the definite articles de and het, lowest in deixis, to tell us we need not search for the hand and ear in question.

Let us now move up the Deictic Scale to deze. Consider [14]:

[14] a. Vind je dat die das bij het jasje past?
Do you think that this tie goes with the jacket?
[Choice complete - hence no problem - hence MID DEIXIS]

b. Vind je dat deze das bij het jasje past?
Do you think that this particular tie goes with the jacket?
[Ongoing and precise selection = hence need for attention - HIGH DEIXIS]

Both sentences communicate that the tie is selected from alternatives and that the speaker is now either wearing it or holding it. Nevertheless there is an important difference in interpretation. a with die is more likely to communicate that the choice of the tie is already complete, b with deze that the chosing is still going on and that a very careful selection is being made. Why?

I think we would agree that it is more difficult, demands more attention to pick out a specific object from a field of nearly identical competitors than from a heterogenous collection. Making precise choices is hard work. Moreover, the need for attention and effort is clearly greater during the choice than after it. The fact that deze should evoke such an ongoing and demanding task more readily than die accordingly supports the view that deze is higher on the deictic scale, signaling greater concentration of attention and thereby alerting the hearer to the need for greater effort on his part.

Other facts, too, support the higher position of deze relative to die. First of all, we would expect that what is known -- what we are familiar with -- would not pose as much of a problem for the hearer as what is unknown. Accordingly, we would expect that the HIGH DEIXIS form deze would be used to introduce new information while the MID DEIXIS form die would refer to old information. This prediction is confirmed. Look at [15]:

[15] a. Daarom wil ik nog graag deze/*die opmerking maken: ". . ."
Therefore I would now like to make this/*that remark: ". . ."
(Van Es and Van Caspel 1973:81)
[HIGH DEIXIS - greater alertness for new information]

b. . . .net zoals bij die/?deze bekende psychotesten, waar men eerst in een plaatje twee hoofden of een vaas ziet . . .
(Oversteegen 1971: 153)

. . .just like in those/?these well-known psychological tests where one first sees either two heads or a vase in a picture . . .
[MID DEIXIS - lesser alertness for familiar information] ("well known")

c. het oeuvre van deze schrijver . . .omdat die schrijver [see [7] above]
the work of this author . . . .because the author . . .
HIGH DEIXIS MID DEIXIS
unfamiliar now familiar

Note that in the discussion of Hermans, repeated in [15c], the MID form die followed the HIGH form deze and not vice-versa.

Finally, one more fact. Human attention is selective. If we are going to concentrate strongly, we are more likely to concentrate on a single thing than on a plurality. We would therefore predict that if deze signals higher deixis than die, it should favor singular noun phrases -- those whose referents would be most coherent with the strong concentration of attention claimed. We therefore predict that deze will tend to favor singular NP's relative to die.
To test this hypothesis I counted the relative frequency of HIGH and MID forms with singular and plural noun phrases in three separate corpora. The data are given in [16]:

[16] CO-OCCURRENCE OF 'DETERMINERS' WITH SINGULAR AND PLURAL NP'S

Hypothesis: Human attention is selective. People are more likely to center attention strongest on single things rather than pluralities. Hence predict HIGH DEIXIS will occur more frequently with singular NPs than MID DEIXIS forms will.

	CORPUS I			CORPUS II			CORPUS III		
	NP sing	NP plur	%NP sing	NP sing	NP plur	%NP sing	NP sing	NP plur	%NP sing
HIGH DEIXIS (deze, dit) :	151	23	86.8 ↑	89	17	84.0 ↑	185	70	72.5 ↑
MID DEIXIS (die, dat) :	378	104	78.4	115	46	71.4	69	43	61.6
X^2 = :	5.73			5.57			4.37		
P less than :	.025			.025			.05		

[I = Hermans 1971, entire (novel); II = Haasse 1972, entire (essay);
III = Nuchelmans 1969:9-129 (survey of philosophy)]

[N.B. Examples from II,III-expository prose-are not concerned with relative distance at all. Hence only the Deixis Hypothesis explains the observable, statistically significant skewing in discourse.]

As you can see, the HIGH DEIXIS forms significantly favor singular noun phrases compared with the MID DEIXIS forms; the hypothesis is confirmed. Note also that since the second and third text were not at all concerned with Proximity to the speaker, only the present analysis -- in terms of degrees of attention -- explains the observed skewings.

We have seen, then, that there is considerable support for a scalar analysis of the Dutch 'determiners,' with deze ranking higher than die and die higher than de in terms of relative DEIXIS or 'Concentration of Attention.' I shall now present evidence that the adverbial pronouns hier, daar, er are organized in the same way.[2]

That er occupies the lowest position on the Deictic scale is shown by the fact that it refers only to situations whose identity poses no problem. As in the case of the definite article de, this can be because the referent has already been identified. Look at [17a]:

[17] a. Ik ben in Den Haag geboren en heb er twintig jaar van mijn leven doorgebracht.
I was born in The Hague and spent twenty years of my life there.
[referent identified, hence no problem - LOW DEIXIS]

It can also be because specific identity is irrelevant, as in [17b]:

b. De laser is er niet alleen ter vernietiging.
The laser is there not only for destruction.
'The laser exists not only for destructive purposes.'

[Identity of referent irrelevant ("existential" message), hence LOW DEIXIS. You don't care where the laser actually is.]

Here the only thing that matters is that the laser is somehow available, on the scene, exists; it's specific location in the universe is not at issue.

That daar signals higher deixis, greater concentration of attention, than er is shown by the fact that it, but not er, can refer to new information, as -- for

example -- when places are being pointed out. Consider [18]:

[18] a. Hij woont precies daar.
He lives precisely there. [MID DEIXIS for new information]

b.*Hij woont precies er. [LOW DEIXIS innappropriate for new information]

Furthermore, daar, signaling MID rather than LOW DEIXIS suggests a greater need for alertness on the hearer's part and is better for communicating surprise and emotional involvement. Consider [19]:

[19] a. Er is me iets overkomen. [LOW DEIXIS - matter of fact]
"Something happened to me."

b. Daar is me iets overkomen. [MID DEIXIS - less matter of fact]
'Something unexpected happened to me.'

c. Daar timmert me waarachtig een politieagent een hippie in elkaar.
"All of a sudden a cop beats up a hippie."

d.*Er timmert me waarachtig een politieagent een hippie in elkaar.

[LOW DEIXIS incoherent in indignant exclamatory sentence]

We now turn to hier. That hier is higher on the scale than daar is shown first by the fact that hier points forward in discourse, introducing new information, while daar points backwards -- exactly parallel to deze and die. Look at [20] and [21]:

[20] a. Hier eindigt onze uitzending.
Here our broadcast ends. [HIGH DEIXIS for announcing new information]

b. 'Wie is Diepwater?'
'Aha, daar vraag je me wat!' (Haasse 1968:122)

"Who is Deepwater?"
"Aha, there you're asking me something = That's some question!
[MID DEIXIS to refer back, to previous question]

[21] a. Hier ben ik de waarheid verplicht het verhaal te vertellen van mijn eigen drie spoken. (Du Perron 1962:308)

At this point I am obliged, for the sake of truth, to tell the story of my own three ghosts. [HIGH DEIXIS announces following discourse]

b. Deze Annelies van Doormaal bleek in het bezit te zijn van een van de foto's die jij daar noemde . . . (Hermans 1971:331)

This Annelies van Doormaal proved to be in possession of one of the photos you mentioned just now (Hermans 1962:309)

[MID DEIXIS refers to previous discourse]

Second, whereas daar, like die can be used for simple emphasis, brute attention-getting, hier like deze, is more contrastive and suggests a need for precision. Consider [22]:

[22] a. (Description of opera performance) . . . I could see both of them now, José and Escamillo, leaning forward, glaring at each other . . .Ten bars, then Escamillo's knife would break and Carmen would shout at José to stop. Daar weerklonk Carmen's stem, te vroeg. But there was Carmen calling out too soon: "Hola, Hola! . . .
(Vestdijk 1950:127; Vestdijk 1965:143)

[Simple emphasis of unexpected event - MID DEIXIS]

Daar is clearly being used for simple emphasis and communicates unexpectedness. Consider now [22b]:

b. (Narrative of conversation)
. . She looked me straight in the eye. 'Because I thought it was wiser not to.'
'Wiser but not politer,' I said wildly, 'I want to know why you treated me like that.' (Hier kwam een kellner het gangetje in . . . (At this point a waiter called out from the passage . . . 'Trix, you're wanted,' and she answered: 'Yes, just a minute, I'm busy.') 'Why do you treat me like this?'
(Vestdijk 1950:158;Vestdijk 1965:179)
[Precise positioning of one event with respect to another, simultaneous event, non-emphatic - HIGH DEIXIS]

Here we have not simple emphasis but the careful positioning of one event with respect to another, simultaneous event. The parallel with deze and die in the necktie example ([14]) is striking. Consider also [23] which displays the similarity.

[23] a. HIGH DEIXIS: Hier riep iemand.
'At this particular point somebody shouted.'

b. MID DEIXIS: Daar riep iemand!
'Suddenly, Lo and behold! Somebody shouted.'

c. LOW DEIXIS: Er riep iemand
'Somebody shouted.'

Compare deze das = this particular tie (Precision)
die das = this/that/the tie (Emphasis)
de das = the tie (Matter-of-factness)

Note the precision of hier, the emphasis of daar, and the matter-of-factness of er. The situational reference of er is so low-keyed that it is typically omitted in English translations.

I have argued, then, that both deze, die, de and hier, daar, er are best analyzed not in terms of Proximity but as indicating different degrees of DEIXIS, Concentration of Attention. In [24] you will find a summary of examples showing the parallelism between 'determiners' and adverbial pronouns:

[24] PARTIAL SUMMARY ILLUSTRATING PARALLELISM OF DEICTIC SCALES

Level	Message Type	Example Det's.	Sentences Adv. Pn.
HIGH (greatest need for hearer's alertness) versus MID	a. precise pointing at entity/ situation versus brute emphasis.	[14]	[22,23]
	b. Cueing hearer for new information vs. reference to old information.	[15]	[20,21]
MID versus LOW (least need for hearer's alertness)	c. Greater need for effort in finding referent vs. referent found.	[12]	[17a,18]
	d. Emphasis versus its lack.	[6]	[6,19,23b,c]
LOW	e. Identification of referent (entity/situation) irrelevant to message.	[13]	[17b,23c]

Still, before we can call this analysis a success, we must explain one residual mystery: the association of deze and hier with nearness to the speaker and of die and daar with distance. If Proximity and Distance are not the meanings of the forms, where do they come from?

Consider [25]. In brief, I argue that the source is human egocentricity. People tend to regard what they experience as more important than what others do. An egocentric speaker, interested in himself, will accordingly use HIGH DEIXIS, the highest concentration of attention, in talking about things near him. At the same time, the hearer, also egocentric, will need the more forceful urging of

HIGH DEIXIS to pay attention to the speaker rather than himself. Now the LOW DEIXIS forms er and de are used to refer to things posing no problem, not needing to be picked out. Hence, what is left over, the MID DEIXIS forms die and daar will be used for what needs attention but is not as important to the speaker as his own personal sphere -- namely what is distant.

[25] Mechanism of association of meaning HIGH DEIXIS with message 'near speaker' and of meaning MID DEIXIS with message 'far from speaker.'

a. People are egocentric.

b. Egocentric speaker uses HIGH DEIXIS to talk about what is near him (maximum concentration on own world).

c. Egocentric hearer needs forceful urging of HIGH DEIXIS to pay attention to speaker rather than self.

d. LOW DEIXIS used when referent need not be searched for.

e. Hence what is left, MID DEIXIS, used to refer to what needs to be searched for but is not as important to speaker as his own world, hence: for what is distant.

To conclude, I have presented an analysis of the 'determiners' and adverbial pronouns of Modern Dutch in which scalar meanings alert the hearer to a kind of inferential complexity -- namely the relative need for and difficulty of finding a referent. I have shown how the range of messages associated with each form is explained by the degree of DEIXIS each asserts. This analysis accounts for the data. Moreover, it accords fully with the truism that language is spoken by people. On the one hand, people are smart enough to infer messages from imprecise hints such as the relativistic meanings proposed here. On the other hand, they are self-centered. Accordingly, in the use of the Dutch deictics -- the exploitations of each form -- we find reflected both human intelligence and human egocentricity.

[1] For the purposes of this paper it is assumed in [9] that the definite article de is integrated into a single system with the demonstrative adjectives deze, die. However, it is also possible that the position of de at the bottom of the Deictic Scale is more de facto than de jure. De may actually belong to a separate, Article System concerned with IDENTIFICATION, not DEIXIS as such. Nevertheless, it will be clear how a 'bona fide' article de, signaling a meaning such as IDENTIFIED, could be exploited relative to 'true' deictics such as deze and die as an even weaker 'demonstrative.' The scale relationship between HIGHER DEIXIS > LOWER DEIXIS > IDENTIFIED (NON-DEIXIS) is the same as that between HIGH DEIXIS > MID DEIXIS > LOW DEIXIS. What is needed is a thorough study of the other oppositions into which de enters, namely its relation to the indefinite article een and to zero ∅.

[2] For more detailed discussion, see Kirsner (in progress).

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